

Are We Ready for the Ring?

Help for Couples Considering Engagement

Rob Green

"Pastors, parents, and friends—give this to the people you love who are in a relationship. It will raise all the important conversations that too many couples never seriously consider. This book will provide wisdom for big decisions ahead."

Edward T. Welch, CCEF Faculty; author

"So many couples rush to the altar without asking the right questions or even knowing what to look for. Rob shows couples how to evaluate their spiritual trajectory without falling into the trap of perfectionism. This book provides a plan for gracious relational discernment."

Brad Bigney, Lead Pastor, Grace Fellowship Church, Florence, KY; ACBC certified counselor; author of *Gospel Treason*

"Rob Green combines his counseling experience, pastoral concerns, and fatherly passion to guide the person considering the next step beyond dating. I can't wait to recommend this insightful tool to my single friends, my counseling and pastoral students, and at some point, my grandchildren."

Robert D. Jones, Professor and Chair of Biblical Counseling and Practical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author of *Pursuing Peace* and *Uprooting Anger*

"Many sincere Christians give either too little thought before becoming engaged, relying mainly on attraction and compatibility, or too much, becoming paralyzed by uncertainty while waiting for every element to perfectly align. *Are We Ready for the Ring?* wisely guides couples through questions that truly matter from God's point of view, equipping them to move forward with biblical wisdom and confidence. I gladly commend it to every prospective couple and those who disciple them."

John Henderson, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling and Practical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"What a practical book! *Are We Ready for the Ring?* wisely addresses the specific needs of dating couples. Each brief chapter is filled with insight, and I especially appreciate the big idea and reflection sections. This manual is valuable not only for the couple but also for parents, family members, mentors, singles ministry leaders, young adult ministers, and youth pastors."

Bob Kellemen, Author of *Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling* and *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling*

"The second biggest commitment someone can make in life is marriage. But how does someone know if they've found the right person or if they are ready for that commitment? Rob Green answers those questions and many more in this excellent book. He draws on Scripture and decades of

pastoral and counseling wisdom to help people discern their next steps. *Are We Ready for The Ring*? is the resource I have been waiting to share with people."

Curtis W. Solomon, Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of Biblical Counseling, Boyce College

"This book reflects Rob's biblical conviction, pastoral warmth, and practical wisdom that have marked his ministry for decades. *Are We Ready for the Ring?* is an excellent resource that will help couples pursue marriage with discernment and Christ-centered hope. We look forward to using it in our ministry with pre-engaged couples."

Kevin Carson, Pastor, Sonrise Baptist Church, Ozark, MO; executive director, Biblical Counseling Coalition

"It's so easy to see through rose-colored glasses when you're dating. But even if you want to make sure you're seeing clearly, it can be hard to figure out how to take those glasses off. *Are We Ready for the Ring?* is a helpful tool for couples who genuinely want to make wise relationship decisions. I would strongly encourage dating couples and those speaking into their lives to benefit from the wisdom Rob offers."

Amy Baker, Ministry Resource Director, Faith Church, Lafayette, IN

"Rob Green's *Tying the Knot* has helped countless couples prepare for God-honoring marriages. *Are We Ready for the Ring?* continues that legacy, offering practical biblical wisdom grounded in decades of faithful pastoral ministry. This is the book I would want my students—and my own children—to read as they prayerfully consider getting engaged."

Trent A. Rogers, Dean, School of Biblical and Theological Studies, Cedarville University

"Young adults need wisdom to prepare well for engagement. This book provides biblical instruction, realistic examples, and practical application for anyone considering engagement. I highly recommend this resource to both young adults and their mentors. Read this book, walk in the way of wisdom, and enjoy relationships God's way!"

Ross Reeder, Pastor of College and Student Ministries, Faith Church

"This brief book covers a host of issues and practical help for couples considering whether they are ready for the lifetime commitment of marriage. I love Rob's approach to pre-engagement counseling and preparation before a commitment is made. This book also provides very helpful information for those who might already be engaged as they consider a marriage that would glorify God."

Stuart Scott, Coordinator and Trainer, BCMW; member care director, ACBC

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Introduction
Welcome to a Joy-Filled Journey

The Big Idea: As you think together about whether you are ready for the ring, remember that you aren't looking for perfection from either of you; instead, you are looking to Jesus for humility, wisdom, an openness to follow his will, and a willingness to grow and change to be more like him.

ENGAGEMENTS ARE EXCITING moments. A man meets with his girlfriend's father and requests his blessing. He saves money to buy a ring that he hopes will serve as a lifelong illustration of his love for her. He thinks carefully about the engagement moment, planning every detail. Some of my friends made elaborate and even impressive engagement plans that included photographers, other family members, scavenger hunts, flowers, special food, and specific clothing. Some men and women are willing to take the leap of engagement quickly while others prefer a longer period of dating and discernment.

Even though it's fun to make your actual engagement a special memory, before that happens, you both have to decide whether this is a commitment you are ready to make. Thankfully, God has provided the Bible to give you his wisdom as you make this decision.

I'm excited and thankful that you want help in working through this decision. I am encouraged that you want to study, learn, pray, and evaluate as you answer the question, "Are we ready for the ring?"

Who Is This Book For?

If you are part of a Jesus-believing dating relationship and wondering if you are ready to move forward in your relationship toward engagement, this book is for you. Engagement is a big step! It is exciting and terrifying at the same time. So I hope this book will provide clarity for both of you as you discern the Lord's will.

If you are not part of a Jesus-believing dating relationship, this book may not be for you. But if you are reading this because you are curious to know what a Jesus follower has to say about marriage and commitment, then I am so glad you are here. We will explain the good news of Jesus Christ later in this work. It is my hope that reading this resource will result in you having a personal and saving relationship with Jesus.

If you are the parents of someone who is dating seriously, you also might be interested in reading this book. After all, it was my children's relationships that pushed me to write this resource. Our children's relationships are exciting and scary for us too. We rejoice with our children, for as Proverbs 18:22 says, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD." The same can be said for our daughters who find a godly husband. However, relationships are also scary because we have seen how much pain a bad relationship can create. We know that some relationships end up in sinful oppression and evil. With all our hearts, we want to help our children avoid relationships like that. Parents, I hope this book provides some suggestions for having your own good conversations with your children about marriage and commitment. Even if your children are not interested in reading this book,

you can influence them with the biblical truths and wisdom contained in it.

What Goals Do I Have for You?

My goal for you is Christlikeness. I hope that Jesus becomes so important and amazing to you that you want to love, fear, and know him more, which is part of how you grow in wisdom for this big step (Proverbs 1:7). I hope your relationship with Jesus motivates you to Christian growth, stirs in you a willingness to work spiritually, and expands your knowledge of the depths of God's love for you in Christ. My goal is not to give you a list to check off so you can get engaged. I'm sure that some couples reading this book will ultimately conclude that they need to end their current relationship and look elsewhere for a spouse. I do not consider that a failure. At the same time, other couples might grow, change, mature, and develop their relationship and decide that taking the next step toward marriage would please the Lord.

Please note—and I will say this several times through the book—the goal is not perfection. You don't need a perfect relationship to move forward. Someday, all followers of Jesus will be like him because we will see him as he is, but that is not this day (1 John 3:2). As you work through this material, it might seem that to move toward marriage everyone and everything must be perfect! But your answer to every question or issue listed in this book does not need to have a perfect score. As I wrote this book, I often thought about how my wife and I did not have a perfect score before we got married, let alone engaged.

Perfection? No. A humble attitude toward Jesus that results in growing love, fear, and knowledge? Absolutely! Through his Word, God emphasizes the sufficiency of Scripture and growth in Christlikeness. Sufficiency is important because we all must have a source of authority. God gave us his Word for many reasons, among them to share wisdom for how to live in our

beautiful but twisted world. Growing to be more like Jesus is important because the Lord wants us to mature and be conformed to the image of Jesus one step at a time. We can please God but still need to please him more (1 Thessalonians 4:1, 10), love him but not understand the full dimensions of his love (Ephesians 3:14–19), or fear him but not enough to control our actions (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

How Preengagement Counseling Differs from Premarital Counseling

Often, those who are looking for help preengagement may read through a premarital resource. While this strategy can work for some, not all the issues raised in premarital counseling will apply to a couple who has not definitely decided to get engaged. It can also create a significant challenge during the actual premarital period. Couples may not get much value out of the premarital counseling because "they already did it before the engagement" and may not think they have more to discuss.

This tension, along with the concern for perfectionism, were the two greatest obstacles for me in preparing, teaching, and writing about this subject. While I feel the tension, there are a few things that apply to both stages. In my previous book *Tying the Knot*, I used "Jesus as the center" as part of every chapter title. I wanted Jesus to have center stage in every topic discussed. I still do! But this book does have substantial differences from a premarital resource.

- At this stage in your relationship, you are deciding whether or not you should get married. So preengagement counseling helps couples **decide** if they believe God is honored by furthering, delaying, or stopping the relationship. Any of those three outcomes could be wise and pleasing to Jesus.

- Premarital counseling, on the other hand, **prepares** couples for marriage. This means getting ready to live in a covenant relationship before the Lord, which they've already decided to do. This does not mean that an engagement can never be broken. Sometimes one learns late in the process that their relationship should not move toward marriage. But we normally expect engagements to lead to marriage.

Do You Need a Mentor to Go Through This Book with You?

You can work through this material without a mentor or counselor. However, there are several good reasons for having a mentor. First, a mentor can celebrate with you the Lord's work. This can be a significant source of joy and encouragement. Second, mentors provide accountability to finish the task. It is easy to start something, but can be hard to finish. Third, mentors encourage honesty and are more likely to spot unaddressed problems in your relationship. Fourth, when you ask someone to mentor you, you are doing them a favor. Every believer is responsible to serve (Ephesians 4:11–16), and they may find it a joy to walk alongside you. In the process, they might discover a few weaknesses in their own relationship.

Required? Of course not. Valuable and recommended? Absolutely.

A Prayer for Your Journey

Let's start this journey with the prayer requests from Ephesians 1:18–23 in mind:

> *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His

> power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Paul prays that our hearts would be enlightened so that we understand the glorious destiny associated with his calling and that we would understand the resurrection power that works in us. We need both to live for him. Enjoy what follows, and let's see what the Lord will do.

Chapter 1
Share a Love for Jesus

The Big Idea: Engagement is an exciting step for two people who love Jesus and desire to grow both personally and as a couple to accomplish all God's plans and purposes. We will explore what it looks like when you both have embraced gospel living as your way of life.

DESIRING A CHRISTIAN marriage and wanting Christ at the center of your relationship is a wonderful place to start. But how does that happen? It's not automatic. It must begin with both of you having Jesus at the center of your life.

Some dating couples might find it surprising that my first point is not about their relationship. But this is a key truth to understand. In his book *What Did You Expect?* Paul Tripp suggests that the person you date is not the person you marry.[1] He explains that while we are dating, we present the best version of ourselves. I'm sure you can say yes to that! It is only after the wedding that the "real you" appears. In his work, *Marry Wisely, Marry Well*, Ernie Baker says that personal preparation is the first step toward making a wise marriage decision.[2] Those who help couples with struggling marriages know that when Jesus is not important to one or both members in a marriage, there can be tremendous pain, hurt, and suffering.

The Bible is crystal clear that Jesus must be our first and highest priority.

> And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37–40)

The church at Ephesus receives a shocking rebuke in Revelation 2:4: "But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love." All of us, including both of you, are called to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind.

The story of King Josiah is one of my all-time favorites (2 Kings 22:1–23:27 and 2 Chronicles 34). Josiah becomes king at eight years old when the country is a spiritual mess. His father and grandfather were wicked and led the nation astray. They rejected the Lord and served the other so-called gods of the nations around them. It seems like a recipe for disaster—an unfaithful nation and an eight-year-old king. Yet, amid all the unfaithfulness within and the dangers without, Josiah's heart is soft toward the Lord. During his rule, he destroys the places of idol worship, eliminates the unfaithful priests, reestablishes the reading of the Bible, and celebrates Passover. The Lord summarizes Josiah's life in 2 Kings 23:25 like this: "Before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him." May the Lord grant the same heart to you.

How do you became someone who turns to God with your whole heart? The Bible emphasizes how that begins with growing in the fear of the Lord. We all struggle with the fear of man. When we fear what people might think, say, or do to us, we can go badly wrong. By contrast, fear of the Lord—putting God first in our lives and caring more about what he thinks and wants

than anyone else—is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10). The fear of the Lord has two sides. First, there is a worship, respect, and love for God that encourages us to do what is right. We desire to do what is right out of reverence for God. Second, we are afraid to do the things he says are wrong. I once asked a man who had committed adultery on numerous occasions with multiple women whether he feared God's discipline. He said that he knew it was wrong, but he did not believe the Lord would do anything about it. Those who do not fear the Lord have few constraints on their behavior. Proper fear of the Lord will protect you from wrong and motivate you to do right.

Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:18–23 that God's people would know the hope of his calling, the glory of his inheritance, and the surpassing greatness of his power working in us. These are more than mere words. We have hope. We know that he will work in us until the end (Philippians 1:6), that he will make us like Jesus (Romans 8:28–29), and that all his promises are yes in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20). This stabilizes us amid whatever turmoil we might experience. When a person believes that God's power works in us, then he or she can live with courage. When we know God's power and love, we want to live to please him in every way.

Living to please God isn't possible without knowing the gospel. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God. We cannot earn our salvation or a right standing before him. We are, by nature, far from God, going our own way—this is what the Bible calls sin (Isaiah 53:6). Have you ever noticed how self-centered you are? That's natural, isn't it? And it's also the source of every wrong. We can't change ourselves (have you tried?), but Jesus can and will when you ask him. He came to earth as a man and lived every day to please God, fearing only him. Then he died, not for his sins (he had none) but for yours and mine. His resurrection was God's yes over his sacrifice for his people. Because he lives, all who turn to him and ask for

forgiveness are welcomed into his kingdom to live forever with him. If you have never turned to Jesus, asked for forgiveness, and given your whole life to him, today can be that day!

> If you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9–10)

If you have a saving relationship with Jesus, then God fills you with his Spirit, so now you have his power to love, accept, and forgive. As you follow Jesus, you will grow more like him—speaking the truth in love, forgiving deeply, and letting grace cover your relationship.

A Christian marriage should always begin with two people who each have a strong personal relationship with the Lord. Don't be afraid to put God first! He will lead you and give you what is best. At a conference, I met a newly married couple who told me that before they met, they both wanted to be married, but they also both believed the Lord was leading them to serve him in places where potential spouses would be difficult to find. Yet, as they loved the Lord and followed him faithfully, God did what neither expected—he gave them to each other. They would never have met if they hadn't put God first.

How Can I Know?

You might agree with everything I just wrote, yet you still wonder whether it is true for you or for the one you are dating. To some degree, we can't know for certain about the spiritual commitment of our future spouse. However, I believe that the following five characteristics are true for those who love, fear, and know the Lord today and desire to grow in the future.

Characteristic #1: They openly discuss the Lord

> Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the Lord say *so,* Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary. (Psalm 107:1–2)

Have you noticed that we talk about what's important to us? I was raised in Columbus, Ohio. When I was young, both of my parents went to school at Ohio State. On special occasions, we went to the campus location of Baskin Robbins for ice cream while one of my parents took a night class. Later, I attended and graduated from Ohio State. While I do not make Ohio State football the theme of my life, I want Ohio State to win and Michigan to lose every Saturday. It is part of my history and my life, and it's even a small piece of my joy.

By God's grace, my wife and I have three children. They bring me great joy. I love talking to and about our children. Two are married and live near us. Their lives are moving fast, and there is always something to discuss. Our youngest and only girl is moving into adulthood.

The Lord has given me an incredible ministry. At times, I have to pinch myself to see if it is a dream. Faith Church has been my home for most of my working career. I preach regularly, lead two adult Bible fellowships, counsel, teach, and lead a Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling program. It almost seems unreal.

My point is this: Family, ministry, and Ohio State are part of my life. They give me joy, and, sooner or later, these subjects find their way out of my mouth. They are part of my DNA, and they are unchanging. Ohio State will be my team until I die, regardless of where I live. My wife and children are part of who I am. Nothing could change that. Even if God called me to

serve somewhere other than Faith Church, that ministry would always remain part of who I am. These are things that make me tick. You have your own set of items. Make no mistake; everyone has things important to them.

So then, what about the Lord? Can you go on ten dates and not talk about what Jesus did in saving you? Can you go on ten dates and not talk about the ways he is working in your life? We speak about the things that are important to us. Do you talk about Jesus and then watch as your boyfriend or girlfriend changes the subject? Does your boyfriend or girlfriend seem energized by the Lord? Even more central, does your boyfriend or girlfriend believe that the Lord is important? I am not suggesting that every date requires a time dedicated to Bible study and prayer, but is the Lord part of the conversation, even normal conversations? Wisdom suggests that those who do not speak about the Lord during dating will not speak much about the Lord after marriage.

Characteristic #2: They consistently have personal devotions and are engaged at church

> How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. (Psalm 119:9–11)

Believers are taught early in their relationship with Jesus that basic spiritual disciplines are an important part of the Christian life. Reading the Bible, praying, and faithfully participating in a local church are part of the foundation for a healthy Christian life. It would be great to see you both encouraging and even leading the relationship in this way. If either of you believes you must guilt the other into Bible reading or church attendance, that is a warning sign for the relationship. These

actions might be some of the first to disappear as the relationship continues to move forward.

You can also consider with what attitude you both go to church. Do you come late, leave early, and act like attending church is a burden? How each of you attends church might provide a window into your relationships with Jesus. Are you actively participating in the discipleship ministries of the church, including a small group, an adult Bible fellowship, or an equipping class?

Characteristic #3: They serve God and others

> As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10–11)

Meaningful service is part of our stewardship responsibility to the Lord. He equips and works through us so we can serve him and the church. Some parents teach their children service at an early age. However, it may be that your family or your friend's family have not had that as part of their family life or goals. Without focusing on perfection, do you both believe and practice the stewardship of one's calling from the Lord?

Since serving can be challenging, it also reveals another aspect of a person's love, fear, and knowledge of the Lord. Is the Lord worth sacrificing for? Does his finished work on the cross and ongoing ministry in our lives call forth a loving response in return? Do you want others to experience the same love, forgiveness, and grace of Jesus that you enjoy? As a father, I wanted my dating-age children to make sacrifices to serve Jesus.

I hoped that the same would be true for their future spouses. In fact, I hoped that they would serve together.

Wisdom once again reminds us that those who faithfully serve the Lord while dating are more likely to serve the Lord in their marriage.

Characteristic #4: They have a faithful track record

> We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of *you* in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, *His* choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:2–7)

Remember that this resource is not designed to set an expectation of perfection for either of you prior to engagement. Jesus will be at work changing us from the day of our conversion until the we meet him face to face. We are not and will not be perfect before marriage and certainly not during marriage. But, while expecting perfection is one ditch we want to avoid, another ditch is expecting nothing. God calls his people to be faithful in following Jesus, and you should be looking for that in yourself and your significant other.

Anyone can fake it for a while. Faithfulness for five minutes is not Christian faithfulness. A friend shared with me that one of his children was experiencing difficult times. His child

had recently married, and the spouse turned out to be someone very different from what the family believed. My friend's child learned about an ongoing adulterous relationship and financial mismanagement, as well as experiencing abuse. It was a nightmare. Perhaps their spouse was such a skilled manipulator and deceiver that no one could have known in advance. But wisdom means we make an attempt to see the person as they genuinely are.

When Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica, he thanks them for their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope, which was an example (1 Thessalonians 1:2–3). If perfection is not the standard, what about being an example to others?

Some enter dating relationships with life-dominating sin issues that are now in the past. Perhaps one or both of you have struggled with addictions like pornography, gambling, alcohol, drugs, or others. Consider what a faithful track record would look like for each in you in each situation. A few questions to ask might include:

- How long did the addiction last in comparison to the amount of time freed from it?
- What led to stopping the addiction (an ultimatum, biblical repentance, legal consequences)?
- What fruits of repentance can be seen? What has replaced the addiction in the person's heart?

I will say more in a later chapter about how to address these matters if they are active struggles, but for now, I want to encourage you both to look for a person who is seeking a lifestyle of faith and who is growing in repentance. There isn't a Bible passage that explains the exact amount of time this might take. However, the testimony of Scripture is clear: We are prone to wander. Even the great reforms of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah were short-lived. Maybe if our standard is being an example

to others, like the Thessalonians were, it might save a lot of heartache.

Characteristic #5: They have a humble heart about change

> But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Those who love, fear, and know the Lord are sensitive to the ways he wants them to change. Rather than act as if they are always doing the right thing, they are bothered by their own sin. When they speak with unbiblical words, they acknowledge it and want to change. When they express sinful anger, they regret it and the way it impacted those who felt it.

Through your dating relationship, you should see change. Both of you should be willing to ask for forgiveness—and to hear the other tell them their concerns. Each of you should be growing in sensitivity to each other. It's true that we cannot change others. Future spouses are encouraged not to think that they will bring about change in the other person. But you should both be able to see the ways that the Lord is changing you.

Some people give lipservice for change but do not want to experience the pain associated with real change. The root of this is pride and an unwillingness to admit that they are a sinner saved by grace. If either of you consistently acts like this, then whatever immaturity and rebellion exist will remain into the engagement and marriage.

It is not enough to acknowledge the need for change with words. Red flags in a relationship include defensiveness when issues are raised, an inability to say "I'm sorry," and acting as if they didn't do anything wrong when challenged. Look for a lifestyle of repentance and faith—where you both ask God for

forgiveness and depend on Jesus's sacrifice to be washed clean. A life of faith will result in observable changes. Becoming a Christian means we ask for forgiveness for our many sins, and being faithful as a Christian means we continue to ask for forgiveness every day. Living like this will result in growing to be more like Jesus. Look for that in yourself and the one you are dating—not perfection, but growth.

I realize that this is not easy. One time I asked my wife a simple question: "Do you know why I am ten pounds heavier than I should be and can't seem to shed those pounds?" Ready for her answer? She said, "Because you eat too much." She was right. I am unwilling to experience the hunger associated with losing ten pounds. When it comes to my weight, I feel like I'm good enough, even though I readily admit that being ten pounds lighter would be good for several reasons. It is one thing to pursue marriage with a person who knows they need to grow and is actively growing, and it's something far different to pursue marriage with a person who believes and lives as though they've grown enough.

What's Your Trajectory?

Engagement is a big step. Before you shop for a ring, consider where you both are spiritually. Are you and the person you are dating people whose choices reflect that you both love, fear, and know the Lord? Do you both have reason to believe that you will continue to grow in the Lord? Since life is all about direction, consider your direction and consider the direction of your boyfriend or girlfriend. Do you both know that you have been forgiven much and that you need to depend on the Spirit every moment of every day for the grace to love God and others? Remember that the Spirit of God can change your direction at any time—all you have to do is ask for forgiveness and the grace to become more like Jesus. He is waiting to hear from you.

Reflection Questions

1. On a scale of 1–10, rate your relationship with Jesus based on the five characteristics listed above. Provide specific examples of why you are giving yourself that number.
2. On a scale of 1–10, rate your boyfriend/girlfriend's relationship with Jesus. Provide specific evidence to justify your rating.
3. What changes in either of your lives might increase these ratings and indicate a deeper walk with Jesus? Possible ideas could include:

    - Regular study of the Word
    - Talking to the Lord about your challenges, asking for strength in your weakness, and confessing your rebellion
    - Asking a spiritual leader to help you
    - Reading material such as *The Gospel Primer for Christians*[3] or *Gentle and Lowly*[4] to encourage you with gospel truth. This change to be more Christ-centered in your relationship could then be reflected with a practice: dedicating one date a month to serving your local church in some capacity, spending a portion of each date talking about what the Lord is doing in our life, or taking time once a month to discuss areas of needed spiritual growth.

4. Consider memorizing a passage of Scripture to grow in your love, fear, and knowledge of Jesus. Possible options include Matthew 11:28–30; John 10:11–18, 25–30; Romans 8:31–39; or Ephesians 2:1–10. Other Old Testament references to the Lord include Psalm 34, 42, 117; Isaiah 53.